

CALFED 1998 ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS PROPOSAL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Title and Applicant Name

The title of this project is the "Fern-Headreach Tidal Perennial Aquatic and Shaded Riverine Aquatic Conservation Project". The Project Applicant is Mr. Tom Luckey the landowner of Medford Island, who currently holds the purchase option for the Fern-Headreach Island Complex located very near Medford Island.

Project Description and Primary Biological/Ecological Objectives

The Fern-Headreach Island Complex consists of approximately 168 acres along the main channel of San Joaquin River, just south-east of Columbia Cut in the heart of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta in San Joaquin County. The levee along the channel (east) side of the complex is maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The remaining levee which is comprised largely of shaded riverine aquatic (SRA) habitat is protected by the property owner. During the winter of 1996-97, two minor breaches occurred on the west side of the Island. Currently, several shallow breaches, created by the past two winter's flooding, allow the 150 acre interior of the island to be subjected to tidal influence. The focus of this project is to 1) exercise Mr. Luckey's purchase option, and subsequently commit the entire 168 acre complex that includes approximately 28 acres of SRA habitat and 140 acres as shallow water tidal perennial aquatic habitat (freshwater) to permanent conservation status; and, 2) to dedicate a permanent conservation easement across the property to the Center for Natural Lands Management, a private, non-profit conservation organization that currently manages over 100,000 acres of conservation property in California, to the Delta Protection Commission, or to another entity approved by the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Approach/Tasks/Schedule

Because the purchase option that Mr. Luckey holds for the Fern-Headreach Island Complex will run out this year (1998), and will not be renewed, the exercising of this option will be completed immediately upon the release of funds for the project. The dedication of the permanent conservation easement will be initiated immediately upon the transfer of fee title of the property to Mr. Luckey.

Justification for Project and Funding by CALFED

The project at the Fern-Headreach Island Complex is being proposed under the category of "Floodplain Management and Habitat Restoration" and specifically addresses numerous priority interests and goals of the CALFED Program, including increasing, enhancing and acquiring significant acreage of SRA and tidal perennial aquatic (freshwater) habitat. The general location

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of the project in the heart of the Delta and next to the main channel of the San Joaquin River in the vicinity of Columbia cut, is recognized as extremely important to numerous sensitive aquatic species. The current situation at this site makes it vital to act immediately or a unique opportunity will be lost as the current levee breaches, which have resulted in the creation of approximately 140 acres of tidal perennial aquatic habitat that make this project especially attractive will be repaired if the purchase option is not exercised. We believe that this project fits exceptionally well with the goals and objectives of CALFED as outlined in the May 1998 Proposal Solicitation Package for Ecosystem Restoration Projects and Programs.

Applicant Qualifications

The applicant currently hold the purchase option for the Fern-Headreach Complex. The applicant is also the owner of Medford Island a few hundred yards downstream from the project site. The applicant has a proven track record of successful habitat restoration and conservation efforts under both the SB 34 and federal Wetland Reserve Programs at Medford Island where over 600 acres have been restored and dedicated through permanent conservation easements.

Budget Costs and Third Party Impacts

The total cost of this project is estimated at \$425,000. There are no projected third party impacts associated with this project.

Monitoring and Data Evaluation

Although a monitoring and data evaluation program is not required because of the nature of this proposal and therefore is not a specific part of the proposal, it is the logical next step once the acreage has been acquired and dedicated. Mr. Luckey is willing and committed to explore future funding for monitoring efforts. Such efforts could include both a fisheries monitoring program and a water quality monitoring program aimed at determining whether the recently created tidal perennial aquatic habitat serves as a "source" or a "sink" for dissolved organic compounds. This is a basic question that has yet to be effectively researched in the Delta. All monitoring proposals could be coordinated through CALFED and the Interagency Ecological Program (IEP).

Local Support/Coordination with other Programs/Compatibility with CALFED Objectives

As mentioned above, this project specifically addresses numerous high priority goals and objectives of the CALFED Program. The project compliments the San Joaquin County HCP effort, the State Levee Subventions (SB 34) Program, and supports the goals of the Delta Protection Commission's Land Use Management Plan for the Primary Protection Zone of the Delta. This proposal is supported by the California Department of Fish and Game, Reclamation District 2091, the Natural Heritage Institute, Congressman Richard Pombo, the Center for Natural Lands Management, staff of the Delta Protection Commission, and local conservation groups like the local chapter of the National Audubon Society.